



Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

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I Want Your Body!

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Affirmation Co-Spokesperson

Ah, what a delightful fantasy. Be honest, at least sometime in our life, we've hoped someone would say that phrase to us. Now it's Affirmation that wants your body. We want your body to join us with other bodies in Tampa, FL, at the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, from April 24 through May 4.

Once again delegates from around the world will gather to determine the beliefs, policies and practices of our denomination. Once again, Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender, and Queer Concerns will also gather to affect change in this denomination. We'll do this with our coalition partners, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN.) We will be showing the General Conference delegates how to Love Your Neighbor. This is both the theme of our General Conference actions, and our goal.

Recently we've seen again the power to create change that people have when they physically gather together. In 2010, people gathered to put conservative Tea Party

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Want to Make History/Herstory? First Officially Sanctioned Same Gender UMC Service

By Walter Lockhart, Affirmation Council Member

Will the 2012 General Conference be the time and place where the United Methodist Church radically opens its doors to include all people? Will the church recognize that caring for those we have baptized includes offering blessings for all people who enter into holy covenant? Will it be clearly approved for United Methodist Clergy to offer both God's grace and the churches blessing on same gender weddings?

When the "YES!" comes, let's be ready to show the world that blessing love will not cause the fabric of the United Methodist Church to disintegrate. Who wants to have the honor of being the first couple to be at an officially sanctioned United Methodist wedding? Do you want to do it at your local church? Would you like to do it at the convention center in Tampa? Should we have hundreds of weddings at the same time?

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God vs. Gay? Book Review

By Johnny Gall, Affirmation Council Member

Jay Michaelson's *God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality* begins with the simple proposition that the conflict between religion and LGBTQ equality—what the author refers to as “God vs. Gay”—is myth, invented fairly recently by our own culture.

I'm working with the assumption that you already knew this was a myth—you good little Affirmation newsletter reader, you—but as far as preaching to the converted goes, Michaelson doesn't do such a bad job of it. His book is by no means ground-breaking. He hasn't discovered the conclusive proof that will finally show the naysayers that God does genuinely love his queer creations. But his work is accomplished nonetheless in its thoroughness.

Parts one and two of the book are especially familiar. Part one, starting on a positive note, offers the reader the argument that the values of Christianity support, rather than reject, LGBT equality. Michaelson builds on this in part two by getting his hands dirty, taking on the same seven verses we've all been confronted with time and time again. Reading through these parts of the book, any person who supports queer in the church is bound to encounter at least ten things they have said or thought in the past month. But somehow Michaelson does this without being stale.

The first section is largely supported by his personal experiences of loneliness, shame and secrecy. These experiences are shared in such a personal and relatable way that upon reading it, no person with a working heart could dare believe that any such thing is what God desires of his creation. Though the arguments are nothing new, part one stands up as a space for the reader to relate to that pain—or perhaps experience it for the first time—and have it well articulated.

The second section then stays afloat by the author's own methodical attitude. After all, we've all encountered the clobber verses. We've all realized that their cultural context is different from our own. We've all seen David and Jonathan as well as Ruth and Naomi used as scriptural examples of romantic friendship. These discussions have been well worn, but Michaelson does us a service by finally hammering that last nail in the coffin. His examinations of the scriptural context, the cultural context, and the translations of Greek

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Affirmation Newsletter

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Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

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Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* Note: substitute the symbol “@” for the letters “_at_” in the email addresses.



The Failure of the Council of Bishops

**Press Release By Tim Tennant-
Jayne, Affirmation
Co-spokesperson
Nov 22, 2011**

The recent letter from the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church (<http://www.umc.org/atf/cf/%7Bdb6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741%7D/COB-STATEMENT-HOMOSEXUALITY-1111.PDF>) is a well crafted letter that side-steps the issue at hand, even while attempting to address it. The Council is trying to lead this denomination in ministry to and with

homosexual persons. Their letter is a response to the signed statements by over 1,000 clergy who are proclaiming their willingness to officiate at ceremonies celebrating same gender relationships, even with the known risks of disciplinary action.

Clergy from a wide variety of annual conferences have signed statements supporting same-gender wedding ceremonies. Inspired by such leadership, each day more clergy and lay members join them. However, contrary to what the Bishops write, these statements are not the root

cause of the "great pain throughout the church." That pain comes from *The Book of Discipline*. The recent statements have only brought that pain into greater public view.

The Discipline does indeed declare the church "to be in ministry for and with all persons." Yet it is also very clear that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons are not as welcome as are other people. The UMC is willing to receive our money, count our membership, and accept our service – if we are quiet

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God vs. Gay...

(Continued from page 2)

and Hebrew offer an interpretation of these verses which leaves every reader able to better flesh out some of their own viewpoints, and finally put the literalist outlooks on Leviticus, Romans, 1 Corinthians and Timothy in the ground where they belong. His examination also does a good job with that god-awful reading of same-sex love being the sin of Sodom, which I can't for the life of me believe we're still discussing.

With these two parts of the debate written and done with, Michaelson takes the final part of his book to stretch his legs and get a little more personal. He moves beyond anecdotes of personal events and finally begins to share his own ideas a little more. This is a slow progress, but by the end of the book,

I got the distinct impression Michaelson was finally writing something of his own, rather than cataloguing and improving previously made arguments. Particularly notable is his use of the novel *Huckleberry Finn* as an example of someone choosing between what they've always heard is morally right, and what they've encountered as good, eventually deciding that they'd rather go to Hell than wrong someone for the sake of moral correctness. It is one of several moments in the text where I can see Michaelson break out of an analytical and critical role and begin speaking freely, and these all tend to be to his credit.

In the end, I can hardly recommend *God vs. Gay* as a definitive text in the queer Christian literary canon. The subject matter is a little too well tread for that. But what Michaelson

does, he does well. If you are someone who thrives on queer theology, you'd do well to look elsewhere (though Michaelson facilitates this process somewhat in his fifty pages of notes and recommendations for further reading.) But if you are someone who does not study theology all the time, and would like to know some of the basic principles of the religious movement for queer equality, it would serve you well. If you're someone who's on the fence, and you'd like to read further into the issue, I'd recommend it. It's not terribly innovative, but it is still quite good.

Membership Meeting

There will be a Membership Meeting while we gather at GC 2012 in Tampa Sunday evening, April 29, in Tampa, FL. The Coalition daily newsletter will have the details.

History/Herstory...

(Continued from page 1)

I have been dreaming about the chance to officiate openly at same gender weddings. Maybe the church will change in Tampa and we can have a ceremony soon after the vote. Maybe the church will not change and we can still openly show the world that United Methodist clergy are here to bless love.

Want Body ...

(Continued from page 1)

candidates in state and national legislatures. A year ago when people gathered throughout the Middle East and Africa they created the Arab Spring and removed long established dictatorships. This past fall many people gathered in New York City and other communities to Occupy the United States. So powerful and effective has this force of human bodies been that *Time* magazine named *The Protestor* as Person of the Year 2011.

But when we gather to protest in Tampa, it won't be just for changing hate-filled legislation, as important as that work is. We gather to inform the General Conference delegates of the truth of God's boundless love. There are still delegates who do not know that God loves all of God's children, no matter with whom we express our love. Like other United Methodists, we are beloved children of God. Like other United Methodists, we too are compatible with this Church by God's grace.

Bishops Failure...

(Continued from page 3)

about our lives. Yet we can not openly serve God who calls us or celebrate our relationships. Ministry for and with us is only discussed if it involves legal action forbidding such ministry.

Many United Methodists like living the lie that our denomination is of one uniform viewpoint and that we "continue to live together." The results of this are much more than "deep disagreements". The results include wide spread rejection of our LGBT children leading to

We need your body and your presence to help us show the delegates what it means to love your neighbor. Whether you can attend for a couple of days or the entire time GC is in session, you are an important part of this work. We need people to help write and deliver the daily newsletter, to serve lunch, to greet delegates, to physically encircle the Tampa Convention Center in love, to work 15 foot tall 'Protest Puppets', to talk with delegates, and to assist with additional possibilities still being developed.

To volunteer, go online at <http://GC12.org>. If you do not have computer access, you can either call the MFSA office (202-546-8806) or the RMN office (773-736-5526) to register via the telephone. Once you've registered, you'll receive discounted housing information. Whether you can join us for the full two weeks, or for a part of that time, we need your presence in Tampa. We hope you'll be able to join us for this important work.

serious depression, wide spread alcoholism, drug abuse, and even suicides. Fearful voices cry of the loss of membership if we learn to accept that God is love, while ignoring the quiet voices of LGBT members, their families, and allies who have already left.

Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns exists to challenge that lie. We are here to help this denomination we love find ways to work together through this time of change, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In a world with too much inaccurate information about God's bounteous variety of sexual orientation and gender identity, we seek to help others find the truth about our lives. The Council of Bishops claims to seek "a more excellent way" of ministry. The valor and faithfulness of the clergy willing to celebrate same gender relationships are indeed one "more excellent way" of ministry.

We recognize that the Church hired the Bishops to uphold *The Discipline*. Ironically, the source of pain in the UMC is also the source of the Bishops' authority. In this letter they only offer prayer and enforcement of the Law. We hope that as they pledge "to offer grace upon grace to all in the name of Christ", they will themselves find the grace and strength of Christ to truly prophetically lead this church.

Check out Affirmation on Twitter at "umchange"! This is one of several shared social medias we will be launching with MoSAIC. Get connected and get engaged as we look forward to GC 2012!

Johnny Gall: SWM, 22, Seeks Dignity, Respect & Civil Rights from His Church

By Johnny Gall, Affirmation Council Member

Johnny, the newest member of the Affirmation council, is fulfilling the role of MoSAIC liaison, having served as MoSAIC leadership for a year now. He hopes to breed a close relationship between the two organizations and to point out any possible opportunities for collaboration which may arise.

Johnny is in his final year of undergrad at New York University, where he studies literature and creative writing. He is currently

applying to divinity school and hopes to find a career in ordained ministry, if The United Methodist Church ever acknowledges that he, as a gay man, is as fit to do so as any heterosexual (and perhaps more fit to do so than some.)

His family having transferred membership from the Lutheran denomination at age six, Johnny has grown up in The United Methodist Church (Memphis Annual Conference) and, while taking issue with several obvious points, is very much in love with the denomination. He respects UCC, MCC and other denominations which have taken the

leap in acknowledging him as a human being, but does not wish to transfer membership, and does not feel this should be necessary for him to fulfill his call to ministry. Nor does he have the slightest interest in ever hiding any part of his identity (save as that of a former country music lover.)

He is still very excited to be working with Affirmation.

Turn-ons include equality, political activism and tattoos.

Turn-offs include spiritual manipulation and Will Smith movies.

Tampa Contacts Sought for Many Tasks

In April of 2012, a wonderfully diverse group of people will arrive in Tampa Bay, FL, to witness and testify to the General Conference Session of the United Methodist Church. We will be traveling from all over the country to be present.

With our geographically diverse coalition it's important to have some local contacts in Tampa. Here are some of the things we will need:

1. People who can house coalition members who cannot afford hotel space.
2. People who have contacts with the food and restaurant industry.
3. People who are willing to help with organizing office and technical support.
4. People who are willing to participate in flash mobs or demonstrations.
5. People with contacts in the mental health field so we have places to refer those needing extra help during conference.
6. People to get up early and hand out newsletters to GC delegates.

7. People who know where to get a charger for a particular phone, know where the local party supply store is or know where the local office supply store is. You just can't imagine what we're all going to need or what's going to get left at home. You just can't imagine how important your knowledge of the area is to someone from out of town.
8. Finally, people who would like to hang out and have fun while volunteering with the coalition.

If you have contacts in the Tampa area, please get in touch with them. If they are interested in helping have them email Walter Lockhart at [REDACTED] (replace the _at_ with @) or they can snail mail c/o Walker Community UMC, PO Box 7588, Minneapolis, MN 55407.

Googling? Try GoodSearch Instead!

We here at Affirmation are really big on earning money in easy, unobtrusive ways. That's why we're so excited about the new opportunities to fundraise using GoodSearch, the Google of charitable institutions. The next time you're on your computer and you need to find something, you can just go to goodsearch.com, select Affirmation as your charity and search away. We'll get a penny for every search term. It may not seem like much, but it's money for nothing, and every bit helps!

Help Make Affirmation Visible at General Conference 2012

By Jan Olson, Affirmation Treasurer

Since my first General Conference in 1988 I have believed one of Affirmation's most important responsibilities at General Conference is to be visible. Our visibility shows our membership, you, that we are there to represent you. Our visibility shows those who may be afraid to come out in their local UM church that they are not alone. Our visibility shows LGBTQ persons who have left the church or have never experienced the church that we are working to be sure they are welcomed when they walk into our churches. Our visibility shows delegates they are not just changing words in a book but are affecting the lives of real people and that some of their actions cause very real pain.

Affirmation's council has great plans to make sure we are visible in Tampa. But visibility costs money. Usually volunteers who go to Tampa must pay their own way. But there are many who would like to represent you in Tampa but cannot afford it. Here's how your donation will help insure our visibility.

\$15	"Compatible By Grace" with Affirmation logo t-shirt for one volunteer
40	Large rainbow flag for ship (see ship note below)
64	400 feet of rainbow crime scene tape
105	Feed a volunteer for one week (breakfast is included in hotel cost)
125	One night in hotel for a volunteer
175	Candles and holders for candlelight vigil
250	12 dozen "Outies" (rainbow bandanas)
275	Average cost of travel to Tampa for a volunteer
300	Chaplain Support Phone Program
375	1000 rainbow heart, squiggle and fish stickers
500	200 rainbow flags on sticks
560	One issue of our daily newsletter
640	Rainbow visors for newsletter distributors
1,100	Rainbow lanyards w/whistle for coalition to patrol hateful language
1,500	Hotel stay for one volunteer the entire length of GC
2,000	Reception "Sweets for the Sweets"
4,000	Rainbow cross, fish or squiggle lapel pin for each delegate
7,100	Cruise ship dinner for 100 departing directly outside the Convention Center
9,000	Send a copy of "The Children Are Free" to every international delegate
15,000	Fireworks display

Fireworks, a cruise? Yes, we are dreaming big. Whether it's a \$40 flag or a \$15,000 fireworks display, we are thankful to you for prayerfully considering what you can do for our visibility at GC 2012.

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* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses above.

Support Affirmation As We Work For Change

Wear Your Convictions on Your Sleeve & Chest

Order one or both of our new Affirmation T-Shirts and identify yourself as an advocate of Radical Hospitality while helping support our work at General Conference in April.

We're offering two different designs in a variety of colors (pink, orchid, blue, yellow, white, or ash.) The designs are available in Small through XL for \$22, and 2X or 3X for \$25. See the order form enclosed with this newsletter. (Electronic edition: The order form is the last page of the PDF. You can print it, or just follow the PayPal instructions.) We can ship two shirts for the same cost as one. You might want to get both designs, or get the same design in different colors.

See the enclosed order form for pictures of the shirts.

Allow 4 weeks for delivery. (Newsletter editor in Texas—this means you!)

GC 2012 Housing Options Still Open for Short While

The Love Your Neighbor Coalition has secured reserved space for housing at the General Conference (GC) 2012 in Tampa. Those who are interested in housing should contact Mary Lynn at gchousing_at_mfsaweb.org to request housing. The housing will allow up to 4 in a room with two double beds.

The Affirmation Council has secured a block of rooms at the Residence Inn Downtown Tampa. This housing will include breakfast and will allow up to three in a room with one queen bed and one sleeper couch. If you are interested in staying near the Affirmation Council please contact Walter Lockhart at [REDACTED]

Housing will no doubt be limited. If you are coming to Tampa, you should reserve space soon.

Update Your Contact Info!

It's important for you to notify us when you move. Have you seen the print quality on the USPS address correction labels?

It helps if we have an up-to-date email address in case your snail mail starts coming back.

To change or add to your information, email us at umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com [replace "_at_" with "@"] Subject: "Address Change" or drop us a line at: Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston IL 60204-1021.

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Punishment Appointments

By Anonymous

I used to say that in the struggle for LGBTQ inclusion in the church, the clergy needed to sit back and let us lay people be the activists. The clergy could be brought up on charges, lose their connection, their pensions, and their livelihood, or at least have to go through exhausting church trials.

What could they do to us lay people? Bring us up on charges and strip our membership? Hey, bring it on! Do what you want to me. I'll laugh at you. Strip my membership in a church that doesn't consider me compatible with Christian teaching? Go for it! I already have plans on what to do with that money that won't be going into the offering plate. (I'm thinking Affirmation, if you must know.)

And then I found something they *could* do to us, and it sends chills down my spine.

They can send our pastor to a punishment appointment. They can force someone else to be the Jesus for our perceived "sins."

Don't tell me it doesn't happen. I've seen a pastor have to transfer to another annual conference because of it. It was either that or retire really early and waste a lot of time getting ordained.

I don't know for sure if it was something the pastor did, or something the pastor didn't do. Was it because when one of the members in my church decided they were going to rid the local congregation of "homosexual influences," the pastor didn't quietly insist that I leave the church immediately, if not sooner? Was it because the pastor wasn't able to smooth the waters quickly and quietly when the anti-LGBTQ crusader came after me with allegations of "hidden agendas?" Good grief, the whole "cleansing the church" thing cropped up out of nowhere and blew up just about over night. Nobody could have predicted it, and a fast response was just out of the question. We were all so shocked. Was it because the pastor didn't make me leave the church before anything like this happened?

So what can we do? If we know punishment appointments happen in our annual conference, we just have to not be at the forefront in our activism. I've gotten very good at taking on tasks that need to be done to keep the cause moving forward, but which keep my name or my local church out of the limelight. It's such a sad thing to have to do. It's a very real return to the closet.

It's even more important now that I be discreet. We have a probationary elder scheduled for ordination in June. My activism is supposed to *change the church*, not *derail someone's ordination*.

It's sad, so very sad. We should be working towards more openness and more acceptance. Instead, our appointment system, district superintendents and possibly even our bishop in this conference are intent on punishing the hell out of us LGBTQ people in the pews, and the pastors that accept us in this annual conference. Sometimes I think the church is moving forward and other times I see how wrong I am, at least in this annual conference.

I hope that GC 2012 will be the beginning of the change we need to see in The United Methodist Church as members, pastors, district superintendents and bishops. I hope that we'll no longer live in fear of punishment appointments for LGBTQ friendly pastors. And that we'll all be able to be honest about who we are, and have our pastors support us openly in all districts and annual conferences.

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